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President Reagan Signs Anti-Drug Bill

Recovery Housing Based on Oxford House Included

On November 18, 1988 President Ronald Reagan signed P.L. 100-690, the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1988. The provision sponsored by Congressman Edward Madigan (R. Ill.) and Congressman Henry Waxman (D. Calif.) is included in the new law. That provision requires each State to set up a $100,000 revolving fund to loan money to recovering individuals who want to rent a group house and run it like an Oxford House. The new houses may affiliate with Oxford House, Inc. The 18 present Oxford Houses will soon be joined by houses all across the country.

Oxford House has come of age. The concept and system used by Oxford House since the first house started in 1975 has been made part of federal law. Now recovering individuals throughout the country will be able to borrow the start-up money (the first month's rent and security deposit) in order to open new democratically self-run and self-supported recovery houses. Oxford House played a crucial role in the development and enactment of the new legislation.

In October 1987 Oxford House, Inc. decided to charter an Oxford House in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania. Oxford House-Bethlehem worked. The fact that it did played an important part in convincing the members of Oxford House that Oxford Houses could be established anywhere in the country. Oxford House-Bethlehem was over 250 miles away from the Washington, D.C. area and initially the question was whether the Oxford House concept and system of operations could work without the close support of the other Oxford Houses in the Washington, D.C. area. The Bethlehem group got a helping hand at the beginning from the Washington Oxford Houses. The Washington group found the house, loaned start-up money, brought a truck load of furniture to Bethlehem and gave the new men the Oxford House Manual. The rest of the contacts were primarily by telephone. By summer of 1988 it was clear that the concept and manual were good enough to make it possible to establish self-help Oxford House recovery houses anywhere.

That fact, coupled with the rapid growth of new Oxford Houses in the Washington, D.C. area led to an interest by Congressman Edward Madigan (R. Ill), who is the ranking minority member of the Health and Environment Subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce Committee. In July he began asking how Oxford House worked and what was needed to replicate Oxford Houses throughout the country.

John O'Neill, one of the Oxford House founders, had earlier directed a study for the U.S. Department of Labor which examined the question of whether the Oxford House concept could be replicated to help homeless veterans who wanted to recover from alcoholism and drug addiction. As part of his study all Oxford House members had participated in a survey which had provided a snap-shot of the Oxford House

Ulimately that may be the way that Oxford House is structure. At present, however, there is only one region -- Washington, D.C. -- that has a sufficient number of houses to have an effective Regional Council. Therefore, at the November Board meeting the Board Members voted for several new By-Laws which had the effect of doing the restructuring in steps rather than all at once.

Step One is that the concept of Chapters and Regional Councils is adopted. Step Two is that an interim Board was voted to serve as Directors of Oxford House for one year. During that year, the interim Directors must present the various individual houses with deals of a plan designed to provide for the election of nine directors of Oxford House, Inc. in a fair manner that reflects representation for all Oxford Houses.

Overall the new By-Laws reflect the cautious and careful way that Oxford House has guided its own development over the last thirteen years. Rather than to just jump into a new method for selecting Board Members, it has chosen a careful and thoughtful approach. Immediately, however, the effect of the new By-Laws is to draw upon the tradition of Oxford House that each house is autonomous because members living in a house know what is best for that particular house. The concept of Chapters keeps the control of Oxford House at the grassroot level. Chapters, for example, will be able to grant charters to new Oxford Houses -- under the old By-Laws only the Board of Directors of Oxford House, Inc. could grant charters for new houses. (See article below on "Oxford House Charters"). The Board will continue to be able to issue charters for new houses but so can each Oxford House Chapter. Revocation of a charter (because a house has violated the conditions of a charter) can only be executed by the Board but the Board must promptly consider a revocation anytime a Chapter recommends such action. The two step revocation process is designed to allay the fears of any individual house that other houses in a Chapter will "gang up on it" unfairly.

Molloy's suggestion that there be separate Chapters for men's and women's houses was rejected. It was the feeling of the Board members that while individual houses cannot have male and female members there is a benefit of men and women's houses beign able to help each other and therefore Chapters should be made up of both men and women's houses.

The interim Oxford House, Inc. Board is made up of the three co-founders of Oxford House-- Whit Holden, John O'Neill and Paul Molloy-- plus three members selected by those living in Oxford Houses and one member from the alumni group. It is anticipated that each Chapter will select a nominating committee to recommend the interim members to be voted on by the houses.

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Fire Safety Watch

With the advent of cold weather it is always good to do a special check on fire safety. Each Oxford House should have a working smoke dectector on each floor of the house. Check to make sure the batteries are working. If a floor does not have a smoke detector get one fast. It could save your life.

Smoke dectectors should be placed about a foot below the ceiling and should be tested regularly. Most detectors began to "beep" as the batteries get low. Do not disconnect the detector. Replace the batteries.

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